Mike Ken: Hi my name is Mike Kenn. I’m actually Michael, but I go by Mike. I was born February 9, 1956, in Evanston Illinois.

My parents grew up in the depression. My dad was the son of a Polish immigrant. He was born in a farmhouse in Battle Creek, Michigan. We were blue-collar, blue-collar. My dad never graduated from high school. My mom did. My dad actually broke his hand. He was going to flunk typing so he is was not going to graduate because he was going to flunk the class because he couldn’t type, so he enlisted in the Army right at the end of the Korean War and at the end of World War II. He was both Korean War veteran and a World War II veteran, but he didn’t see any combat in either theater. I didn’t know that until he died that he was a veteran of both wars; he just kind of fell right in the middle in between both of them.

Very self-sufficient family. When you grow up in the depression you learn to have to do everything for yourself, which even means putting food on the table. His brothers would hunt squirrels, and rabbits and things like that because they couldn’t afford to buy meat. You had to learn to fix everything yourself. That reflecting back is a strong influence of being self-sufficient and learning how to take care of things for yourself and not relying on other people. We never had a repair man in our house ever, until they switched the TV to color from tubes to circuits. My dad didn’t know how to fix the color TV and we had to bring somebody in to fix that, but it didn’t matter if it was electrical, carpentry, plumbing, air conditioning, automotive, we learned how to do it all. I’m not as good of a mechanic as my two brothers are but we all basically were raised the same way, is that we all know how to do everything relatively well.

My mom worked. When my dad came back from the war he went up to Wisconsin with an Army buddy of his and drove a beer truck around Wisconsin delivering beer. Then came back to the Chicago area and got a job at a company called the [inaudible 02:44]. He was their first employee. He would do ventilation system and gutters. First job he was on and Vic [inaudible 02:57] was the owner of the company ... It’s a funny story. I’ll tell it ... Dad’s up on the ladder putting these gutters on the house and Vic come by and says, “Hey Leo, what are you doing.” “What do you mean Vic; I’m putting the gutters on a house. He says, “I know you are Leo, but you’re putting them on the wrong house.

My dad was their first employee and work for them for 37 years. He worked from being the first employee, to a journeyman, to the field superintendent running all their jobs, the entire field. There would be times where they had 5 or 600 guys on the job. They were the largest ventilating contractor in the Midwest. They would do jobs like O’Hare Field and my dad ran all the people in the field.

My dad was mechanically very smart and he had really good intuition too. It was really interesting. Here’s a guy who didn’t even graduate from high school, never went to college, and they would have a ventilation job on a building that was maybe 12 or 15 million dollars, which was pretty big for back then. The engineers would go ahead and do the schematics and lay it all out and everything then they walk down the hall to my dad and they’d say, “Leo, tell us what you think about this.” He’d go, “All right, you need to change this, do this, move this over here, do that and everything like this. It’ll save us 2 ½ million dollars and it’ll work better.” They go, “Okay Leo, thanks, and then they just walked back out.

That’s the kind of person my dad was. Because of that influence too, we never really ... I think it could be seen as a good thing and a bad thing is that ... We don’t look for help from other people, nor do we ask for help from other people. Maybe it’s the Polish heritage. My mom was Irish. I got to make sure I put that in there because I’m Irish- Polish and Lithuanian. I guess it’s more in our personality. I think it’s a problem with our youth of today is that they’re always looking for somebody to fix their problems. The way I was brought up you always had to find a way to take care of it yourself. That was a huge, huge influencing factor on why I think I’ve always kind of gravitated towards the leadership position, to be in front, because like I maybe said earlier. I trust myself. I know who I am. I might think I know who you or somebody is, but I never really do.

Like you being an X armed forces guy; the guys you do trust the most, or the people you trust most are the ones you’ve been in the field of battle with. Football was a sport, and sports are in general, especially football since it’s such a combative sport is that you know who you can trust on the field of battle. I also tell my two girls and other young people is this, “You’ll be lucky in life if you’ve got 5 really good friends. If you’ve got more than five, which means you can raise your second hand, which means you’ve got somewhere 10 or less, you’re a very fortunate individual to have friends that are that loyal to you. Luckily I do. In fact, I got more than 10.

I think it has to do with the area and the air that we grew up in too, because we all came from the depression, parents, and we all learn to do things on our own, because we grew into a middle-class family but we were originally maybe lower middle class to lower class in the beginning, but we made it work. I didn’t know how economically challenged my parents were until I got older. We always had food on the table. We always had clothes on our thing, and my dad made her work. Unfortunately he died at a young age. He died at 67. My mom was taken care of financially, and still is today, and has plenty of money, and the house is paid for; he did that because he was thorough.

He always used to say, “Son ... and I always remember this ... “if you going to do something, do it right or don’t do it.” You’re either all in or you’re not. Once you make the decision to do it you’re all in, and do it right, and finish it right. Once you start something finish it. Don’t retreat or stop ... and that simple little statement there ... If you’re going to do something, do it right or don’t do it. I’ve kind of always been all in on that premise.

I was always very tall, but I was always very thin. In fact, my mom used to always take me to our general practitioner, Dr. Murphy, and she used to always ask him, “Why is my boy so skinny. Is there something wrong with him.” He used to tell mom, who goes by Sis, “Sis he’s fine. Don’t worry about it. How’s his appetite.” She says, “I can’t feed him enough.” This was an annual thing and she was always concerned.

I went to a parochial Catholic grade school, St. Mary’s. Started to play football there when I was in fifth grade, so at 10 years old. They tried to get me to play basketball, which I did, but I wasn’t very coordinated at that time and just couldn’t. I was an eighth grader; I was already 5’ 11”, so you got to play basketball. We never won a game in grade school in football in 4 years. Maybe it something to do that we wore powder blue uniforms, but we never won a game. There was one big public high school in Evanston, Evanston Township High School, and even Skokie the neighboring city didn’t have a public high school ... and that high school had been there for quite some time. In fact, my dad went to high school there. We had over 5,000 kids in attendance. In fact, our graduating class, when I graduated was 12,000 kids.

Went there, and went out for the football team, just like all my other friends did. I was, I think, 6’ 4" at the time and I may be weighed 145 pounds. It was an interesting way that they conducted their evaluations back then. They would do all these non-equipment drills, running and things like that, and those who excelled the best are who got to pick from the equipment. We had 120 guys go out for the team, but we didn't have an abundance of equipment. Who they evaluated over a 4 day period, and they were the ones who got to pick the best equipment. I was in the last group that got to pick from the equipment. I was an offensive and defensive lineman, so there wasn't much left. There was a helmet that had 2-bar face mask and a bull ring, which is usually not worn by an offensive or a defensive lineman, but that's all they had left.

Then we put the equipment on and we started actually do contact drills, and for some reason, and maybe it was because I was very light even though I very tall, I knew that the only way I was going to be successful playing was that I had to be in a leverage winning position. We ran this drill, one-on-one line blocking drill, me as the offensive lineman and I was dominating the drill to the point where they get putting another defensive lineman, and another defensive lineman, and another defensive lineman in until the point where I where he says, “Hey, maybe we made a mistake in this kid’s evaluation. He can play.”

A lot of people talk about self-esteem, and I didn't have a lot of self-esteem when I was growing up, because people did look at me, and I would see pictures of myself; I was skinny guy, 6’ 4” and 145. Even when I was a senior in high school I was 6’ 6” and I bulked up to 198. In fact, when I was getting recruited for college and I got letters from everywhere, because I was every all-state team ... I made all the accolades in my senior year and the college representatives would come to visit me at the high school, and they said, “You're not the guy we saw on film.” I go, “Well yeah I am.” They said, “No, you look like a basketball player.” I said, “Well, no that’s me,” and they would leave. There was a lot of high interest on paper but in reality they just didn't think that I had the physical size to play the sport of football.

That was a challenge from a perception standpoint, so you’re a little self-conscious about that. I worked very, very hard in the beginning. I used to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning and I would go to high school, on my own, to go to the weight room to try and put on size and gain strength. I ate 5 large meals a day. They really couldn't feed me enough. In fact, after the eighth-grade football banquet ... What are you 13 then I think ... I ate 28 pieces of chicken. The only reason why I didn't eat more is that they ran out. I had a voracious appetite, and I always did.

My mom used to make me, in high school, five sandwiches a day just to go ahead and supplement the meager lunch that they would serve you because it was never enough. It would take me about hour and a half to eat lunch, which was nice because I got a chance to visit with a lot of people, because they would finish and leave and other people would come over.

I had just, I guess, inner drive that I really don't know where it came from. A lot of people used to tell me, “No, you can't do that,” and it mostly had to do with sports. I went quietly to myself and said, “Yeah, I can do that.” That kind of developed through high school. In fact there’s certain individuals who influence who you are as you grow up and one of them was Murray [Lazare 14:50] who was my head coach in football as a senior on the varsity team and also lacrosse. He was a very intuitive individual. I noticed this because he had a test that you either had to bench press a certain amount of weight, or you had to do a certain amount of push-ups or you couldn't play. I couldn't pass either one of those tests. Between he and I he made a concession for me because I think he noticed that I had a huge earnest to want to play and that I was very committed. He never really directly said to me that I’m going to let you play anyway, even though you didn't pass those tests, he just ignored the fact that I did not, and I obviously became one of his better players.

Then I was lucky enough to go ahead and get a scholarship to University of Michigan, where I played for a legendary coach, Bo Schembechler, who was a very difficult man to play for, but was fair to point ... and all his players will say this who played for him is that ... he treated us all the same like dogs, so it really matter. If you could be successful in an environment that he presented, that he challenged you with, you basically can go ahead and take those fundamentals and apply them to life and be successful in life.

Had the same with the offensive line coach there at the time, Jerry Hanlon, who was a short little Irishman, who was extremely passionate, screamed and yelled, even cried but laughed with you too, and was very supportive, but challenged you. Fortunately, not only in high school, but through Murray [Lazare 17:03] and college with Bo Schembechler and my offensive line coach Jerry Hanlon, I think those 3 individuals basically created my foundation for success moving forward, because they challenged you to go the extra mile by telling you that the only thing that's keeping you from being successful is you, nobody else. I accepted those realities and applied them and obviously what has occurred since then speaks for itself.

They took a chance on me in Michigan. I actually bulked up to 207 pounds when I finally reported in. I didn't sign a letter of intent to go to college until six weeks after the fact. In fact, I hadn’t been offered a scholarship by any school, even though I’d probably gotten 50 letters from colleges. My parents couldn't afford to send me to college. My student advisor and I think [inaudible 19:19] had a relationship with the University of Cincinnati and I got a late visit down there. They loved me and they offered me a scholarship on the spot, but I hated the place. I thought it was awful, but I knew my parents couldn't afford to send me to college. I said, I either have to go ahead and accept this scholarship or I’m not going to school, or I say no and then I’ll have to junior college or something like that. That's just the way it is.

I ended up, luckily saying no, I'd like to go ahead and talk to my parents about this. I didn't want to disappoint them, but I could tell instinctively that this would be the wrong decision. Reflecting back on it now I realized that intuition is a very important component of who you are and how you make decisions. I think a lot of people make mistakes when they ignore what their intuition is on a given situation. They'll see the money or they'll see the prize, but they got a bad feeling in their stomach if they decide to go ahead and take it. It’s the wrong thing to do, but they'll do it anyway, so their priorities are out of whack.

I went back home. I didn't want to disappoint my parents because I knew they couldn't afford to send me to college. I went back and I said, “Dad, I’m sorry. They offered me a scholarship. I couldn't take it.” I said, “I just didn't like the place. I knew it wasn't a good fit for me.” He said, “Son, that’s okay.” I said, “If I have to go to junior college that’s what I'll do.” He said, “Son, whatever you do, I'm going to support you.”

I think back when I was in college you were able to give 20 scholarships a year, no 25, actually, so you had 100 total. If I remember correctly, there were only 12 scholarship athletes from my freshman class that finished at Michigan because 13 of them left. It was hard. In fact, there was a sign up about the door, a lot of the doors they put up ‘Those who stay will be champions’ ... a lot of them were offensive linemen ... Someone had crossed out ‘champions’ because so many guys were leaving ‘Those who say will play.’ It was hard.

Before that they used to give 160 to 180 scholarships and they would run players off to get down to 120. Even [Bill Bryant 21:21] did that. In fact, when I was coming out of high school there was a book that was just written called, ‘Meat on the Hoof.” One of the coaches in it was Frank Kush from Arizona State and the other one was the Texas coach ... I can’t remember his name ... Darryl Royal maybe ... maybe Darryl Royal, yeah. I read that book just before I started to get recruited and make visits. Oh and this will lead into a story.

One of the things that I read about Arizona State was one of those schools that gave 180, 200 scholarships knowing that they would run them off. They had a mountain there that they that they referred to Kush’s Mountain. If you screwed up in practice you had to run the mountain. It wasn’t a little mouth. It was a big mountain and you had it to run it to the top and bring it back down. They painted Frank Kush to be a maniac. I got recruited by Arizona State in Arizona, and I’d actually did make a trip to Arizona. The next weekend I was supposed to go to Arizona State. I asked the players who were, I would guess my chaperones at the time, I said, “I just got done reading this book, ‘Meat on the Hoof ' and it says some pretty disparaging things about Frank Kush. “Oh yeah, they’re all true. Have they invited you for a visit?” “Yeah, they have.” “Oh, you don't want to go there.” They confirmed whether it was truthful or not. I canceled my trip to ASU.

Another life’s lesson that I didn't know was a lesson at the time, occurred from this. Arizona didn't offer me a scholarship either at the time. As I told you earlier, no one had offered me a scholarship, and I had arranged a visit for University of Cincinnati and I had turned them down, so I was sitting at home not going to college. All of a sudden I got a phone call from the gentleman who was recruiting me at Arizona and said, “Mike, we've decided that we want to offer you a scholarship to University of Arizona. I really liked Arizona. First time I had ever been on an airplane was flying down to the University of Arizona, in the middle of February, got off the plane with my winter coat in my hand, walking down the steps, not on the jet way, were girls with flowers and halter tops and it's 82° out. I said, “There’s something right about this picture.”

I had a great time, loved the University, loved the desert, I liked everything about it, but they didn't offer me a scholarship, so when they called and offered me a scholarship I was ecstatic. He says, “But, will you accept it.” “Yes, I’ll accept it.” He says, “You have to promise me that you're giving me your word that if you accept this scholarship that you will keep it.” I said, “Absolutely no problem. I give you my word. I'm going to keep this scholarship. He says, “All right, I'm getting on the plane to fly to Chicago right now. I'll call you when I get on the ground and you can tell me how to your house.” I said, “Okay, great no problem,” and hung up the phone. My mom is sitting there and my dad's at work, and she said, “What happened.” I told her and she was just ecstatic and I was ecstatic too. I said, “Wow, great.” It was my second choice. I always wanted to go to Michigan for some reason. I don't really know the affinity for it, but they had both a great football program and great academics, but I was ecstatic about Arizona as a second choice.

About three hours later, the phone rings, and it's Michigan, and it’s coach Schembechler. He calls me Kenn. He did that everybody. He calls you by your last name and doesn’t start calling you by your first name until you leave. He goes, “Kenn, we want to offer you a scholarship to the University of Michigan. I was like, “Ah.” “Well do you want to come to Michigan?” “There is a problem.” “What do you mean there's a problem. We’re offering you a scholarship to the University of Michigan. You don't want to be a Michigan Wolverine?” I’m hesitating, I’m going, holy crap, I just gave my word for the first time in my life, I'm 18 years old ... Then my instincts kicked in and said, “Yes, Bo, I’ll take that. I guess I want to come to Michigan. I'll take that scholarship.” “All right, congratulations” and everything like that, and I hung up the phone. I looked at my mom ... I think I had tears ... “Mom, I think I made a mistake. I just broke my word.”

It devastated me. For a long time I didn't know if I had made the right decision. Then I figured it out. I figured it out that big time college football is a business. Once I got into it, why did Arizona ... because the head coach at Arizona was the former defensive coordinator at the University of Michigan. Why did they make me promise to go ahead and keep this scholarship. I found out later that they had found out that Michigan was going to offer me this scholarship, so they tried to use [inaudible 27:11] Michigan, put the pressure on an 18-year-old to go ahead and make him promise something ... which still to this day I think this is not an appropriate way to act ... I had regrets about it for a little bit, but then finally I got over it, recognized it was just part of the business side of college football. Obviously, my intuition was correct because my career at Michigan and subsequent career in the NFL speaks for itself. I don’t know if that would have turned out that way at Arizona. My dad told me, “Don’t worry about it, son.” I said, “Dad I thought it was the right decision for me to make.” He says, “Then it probably was, and you'll be fine.” He was right.

My dad was something that’s missing in society now is that ... He was quiet leader. The way that he raised as children is that, he was the kind of parent that was very watchful over his children but he wasn't intrusive. He kind of looked over your shoulder to make sure that what you were doing that you weren’t going to harm yourself or what you were doing was going to harm somebody else, but he would let you fail on a regular basis, and then ask you, “What did you learn.” In fact, I would go to him and say, “Dad, this is what I'm thinking about doing. What do you think?” He said, “Well son, if I were you, this is what I would do and these are the reasons why I think this is what should be done. You go ahead and you make your own decision, but remember whatever decision you make, whatever consequences come with this, come with that decision. There were many times where I disregarded the advice of my dad and the consequences that he laid out were exactly what they were, but he didn't stop me from doing it.

I learned, early on from him, and in the appropriate way that he tutored us is that you need to go ahead and learn how to deal with failure and the consequences of that. What I also learned from him is that, in fact, I actually have an issue with the word failure. I actually think that the more appropriate description is that I was unsuccessful, and it has to do with the intent behind the decision or the action that you take.

I told both my girls this and I’ve talk to people about this is that as long as your intentions are appropriate, meaning that you've done all the due diligence, you've done the research, you’ve made assessments, and you've concluded that this is the action that you’re going to take for the desired outcome that you believe it will achieve, and you move forward with that decision and your unsuccessful in doing that, you haven't failed, you’ve just been unsuccessful. People would ask, “What do you mean I haven’t failed. I did fail. I wasn’t successful.” I said, “No, look at your intent behind it. You did everything you thought was appropriate. You did all your research. Your intentions were good, but you didn't anticipate something that you didn't know about. There was an outside influence that you couldn't control. There’s something that was unknown to you that you couldn’t factor in, so that’s not failure. That's just you not knowing certain aspects. What you need to do is remember that and when you're ever in that situation again, make sure you apply what you've learn to that unsuccessful event and make sure it doesn't repeat itself.

The only time that I think that you’re really a failure is when you've done something, you make a decision that you know is malicious, that where you’re trying to manipulate people, you're trying to cause harm. That speaks to the quality of the person because you're not doing it with the right intentions. You’re doing it for adverse reasons. That's what I learned from my dad and that's what I kind of took into my life. I also realize that the way that I was brought up and the challenges that I was faced with from being a very skinny young man, trying to be successful in sports ... I played every sport as a youth from baseball to hockey. I was good at some; I was always a little bit better at football ... is that there aren't really problems in life; there's really just challenges. A lot of people get so weighted down when they're faced with the circumstance that they can't find the solution for it. What they have to recognize is that sometimes solutions aren't readily apparent. There’s like oh, I got a problem, and here's the fix. Well it’s a work in progress sometimes. Sometimes they are, okay here’s the problem, here’s the solution; next question. Well I got a problem, he says, “Well, what’s the solution. I don’t know yet, but I’m going to get there. I’m going to go ahead and mitigate it, and I'm going to manage that problem until I go ahead and find a solution for it.” You don't know how long that process is going to take but you will eventually get there.

I've got some problems that I'm still managing now; I’ve been managing for years, but I’m still confident that one of these days that I'll go ahead and identify a solution for them to eliminate that problem, but I'm not going to go ahead and weight that done, because problems are just a next challenge in your life. You don’t know when they're going to present themselves to you, and they’re present themselves to you every day so you have to accept that reality. That's just part of life. There’s no way in the world that were ever going to be able to anticipate them.

In fact ... both my girls and my wife they call me the ‘Fixer’ because I'm always very calm in the face of a crisis... That might have to do a little bit with football and maybe with the position that I played. As an offensive lineman and in football in general, as a player there’s 60 to 70 plays a game, and they happen every 45 seconds. If you make a mistake that has consequences on the game you've got to deal with that mistake, and you've got to be ready to go ahead and play the next play within 45 seconds. I can't dwell on the failure; I can't dwell on that mistake. If I do, basically, it's going to affect the remainder of the game. That mistake can be in the first play, 10th play, 20th play, it could be the 55th play, with only 10 plays left in the game, and you can't let that affect your performance the rest of the time period. That’s something that I think I learned from football dealing with a crisis is that you’ve got to go ahead and mitigate it, you got to manage it immediately, and then go ahead and move on to the next thing, if you don't you got a problem.

Got through college and graduated on time. Again, was a little bit better than everybody else. I was lucky enough to be drafted in the first round of the 1978 draft and 13th pick by the Atlanta Falcons. Really didn’t have any aspirations at any time of my life to play professional football. I like the sport, I like the competition, I like the camaraderie with the team and I like to compete. I think it’s innate in my personality; I like to compete. I embraced the opportunity to be a professional football player and the challenges that came with it. Maybe that goes back to the challenges I faced in my youth. Someone entrusted me their opinion that I deserve to be 13th pick in the draft; 1- I don’t want to disappoint them, and 2- I don’t want to disappoint myself, and then 3- I want to go ahead and show everybody that I could be successful. Not because I wanted their endearment or their praise or even their adulation; I just wanted to show them. Not in a boastful way because that’s not my personality.

I ended up having a 17 year career in the NFL. There was a difference between the professional football then there was on the amateur side, which is in college athletics. You’re an amateur in college which means everything’s an elective; you can choose to do it or not, but when you become a professional now it’s a job. Now you’re getting paid to do something. Now it’s a way of life. It’s your way of life. It’s how you’re going make an income and that’s how you’re going to support your family.

In fact ... I won’t tell you the long story but ... My wife tried to pressure me into marrying her before I got drafted because we dated since my sophomore year in college. I told her, “Honey, I’m not going to ask you to marry me until I have a job and know that I can support you financially.” She gets it now but it didn’t play that well then. Then after I got drafted we got married after my rookie year and we’ve been married ever since. It’s 37 years now.

One of my team mates, who I ended up playing with 9 years, Jeff [Enno 37:33], who was already there for 9 years was involved with the Player’s Association. He liked me, a fellow offensive lineman, and he said, “You should consider getting involved with the Player’s Association.” I thought about it and I said, “You know he’s absolutely correct. I don’t want to rely on other people to tell me what is or is not effecting my working conditions and my viability in accordance with these business relations ... we had employer/employee.”I’ve never been an individual who likes to sit in the background. I want to be in the game. I want to be on the field. I want to be a direct participant because not that I’m distrustful of other people but I know my evaluation and my assessment is going to be honest and sincere and I can’t necessarily say that for everybody else.

If I’m going to be comfortable with all the aspects around my employer/employee relationship I need to get involved on the Association side, so I ran for alternative rep. I got elected by my teammates. Ran for Player Rep. Got elected by the Player Reps onto to the Executive Committee NFL PA. Then circumstances changed a little bit. We had been through two strikes; 1982, which was a long and hard strike and also one in 1987, while I was on the Executive Committee that actually ... they played substitute games or Scab Games that we called them at the time.

They started to talk to me about running for President of the NFL PA. Up until that point it had been a position of very high mortality, which means if you got elected as president of the NFL PA, basically your career was over in about a year. They would trade you to another team, and say that you lost a step, and all of a sudden you were walking the streets. They were 2 year terms. Nobody had run ... In fact in my tenure had been President for more than one term; 2-year term. We were out of our annual meeting and they were talking to me about it and I had become pretty much a leader within the executive committee. I went and talked to my wife Joni and I said, “Joni, if I agree to go ahead and do this, there’s some potential consequences, adverse consequences would come with this.” I laid it out to her. She said, “Well what do you think?” I said, “Well to be honest with you, I actually think it’ll motivate me more to play at high level. I need a little bit more stimulus to make sure that I keep my game up there, so if they want to get rid of them I’m going to make it really, really difficult for them to do that.”

I decided to do it and knowing full well that I could be completely wrong; that I was going to end my career, and that would have been about 11 years into it, I think, at that time. I was still considered one of the top tackles in the game. I became President and ran and won for 4 successive terms, so for eight years.

What I learned during my eight years as President of the NFL PA was learning how to deal with multiple personalities, and also different agendas. Football players are a type A personalities in general, and having type A personalities they have the tendency to be very opinionated and vocal. The Executive Committee, which is a smaller version of what the Player Reps are, are more an advisory and a steering committee. When the actual votes are taken on policy it’s taken by the Player Reps. The interaction between Executive Committee, and the President, and the Executive Director and the staff is more frequent then it was with the Player Reps. It was always a challenge to go ahead and convince the Player Reps what we believed was the appropriate course of action. This all had to take place within a three day period with our annual meeting.

There’s always little different factions out there. Our Executive Director was Gene Upshaw, who I hired in 82, while I was on the Executive Committee ... There were pro-Gene and then there was the anti-Gene. We knew where we wanted to get to; we didn’t know how long it was going to take us to get to that point, or when it was the appropriate time to call for the vote, thinking that we would have votes or not have the votes. That’s when I learned how to manage personalities.

I never held anybody’s opinion against him because it was their opinion. They had the right to have that opinion and just because I might disagree with that opinion doesn’t mean I shouldn’t like the person. Hey, it’s their opinion and that’s their God-given right to have that opinion. I have a different point of view, and I’m going to try to go ahead and convince them in an appropriate way that they should change theirs because this is going to be in their best interest where I think theirs might be adversarial, but I’m never going to go ahead and hold that opinion against them. I think that helped me very much on the Falcon County Board of Commissioners too because there were some very unique personalities on that Commission, and even though they would say some disparaging things to my face about policy, or me personally or say it in a public venue I never held it against them and really didn’t care what they thought about me. I was just trying to go ahead and advance what I thought was in the best interest of the Fulton County; same thing I was trying to do at the NFL PA.

So at the end of the day the only they only requirement that I ask for ... and they always did it here too ... is that once we finally take a vote we’re all in this together. We all have to speak for the same voice, because if we break in the factions the league will use that against us and try and divide us. Maybe that comes from Bo Schembechler, because I think if anybody who follows college football remembers Bo, what he continually reinforced with us is that it’s not the individual who’s most important ... and nobody’s more important than the team. It’s the team. It’s the team. It’s the team. I’ve always been a very team oriented guy. I was able to apply those principles. My work with the NFL PA is to work with those different personalities and make sure everybody’s keeping their eye on the ball, on what our goal was, and where we’re going to get there, and how we are going to get there. Not all at once, but incrementally, but slowly go ahead and make progress.

It’s like, I tell my girls, I say, “You would like there to be a straight line between A and B, but there’s not. It’s actually a jagged line. In fact, sometimes you're moving in the wrong direction, but if you believe that you’ll eventually go ahead and find yourself back on the right patch you’ll actually get to B. You just got to believe that fact. As things are presented to you, you've got to react to them appropriately, maintain your principles, listen to your intuition, you will eventually get to the point B as long as you maintain your integrity and in the process, you'll get there.

I didn't know this at the time, but I got lucky ... I got lucky with my owner, Rankin Smith. He’s been very disparaged. In fact they had a ceremony honoring my retirement the year after I retired; the fans. He presented me with my jersey. They booed him unmercifully. You really couldn't hear what he was saying. I could; I was on the field. He made a statement there, which was one of the greatest statements that someone every said about me in general. He praised me for what I did on the football field, but what he said was that what Mike Ken should be most remembered for is not only what he did for the community but what he did representing the players of the National Football League as President. Then I recognize this. He understood, contrary to other owners like a Hugh Culverhouse or a Leon [inaudible 46:54] something like that it was maybe my first political lesson in business is that the Player’s Association, The Player’s Union was not going to go away. You aren’t going to be able to kill them. He says, “They were a necessary component to the relationship, owner and player.” He never held it against me, personally, for the leadership role that I took in order to represent the player’s interest. He just knew it was part of business. That was really a profound statement on his part. I didn't realize that he thought that until he actually made it at my retirement ceremony.

I had developed a courage then to, 1- recognize what the consequences were, but I wasn't afraid of the failure that would be associated with it, because, as I kind of touched on earlier, my intuition told me it was the right thing to do. Not just for me but for everybody else that I was involved with. I followed my intuition on that even though I didn't know what the consequences would be in the future. Luckily I, 1- did it for the right reasons, 2- my intuition was correct and there weren't any negative consequences associated with that.

After I retired from the NFL, and I was fortunate enough to go ahead and exit ‘walking’ as I call it. I wanted to, since I played for so long, I wanted to finish on the field. I didn't want to be riding the bench because I had never been on the bench. I started every game. I played from the very first preseason game as a rookie and I wanted to finish on the field of battle. All the last game I wanted to wave to the crowd and walk off, and I was able to do that. Very few NFL players get to do that. The decision’s usually made for them either 1- they’re replacing you with somebody better, or 2- your career is cut short by injury. I was one of the lucky ones who got to choose when I retired.

My wife and I explored the normal societal option from a charitable standpoint, after I retired starting a charity and how can we give back to the community that had been so good to us for the 17 years. I'd always kind of paid attention to what was going on politically because I cared about the community and I also was being watchful of my community. I wanted to make sure that people were making decisions that were, not only in my best interests, but the community's best interest.

I also had a fundraiser for, I think, it was Commissioner Bob Fulton and started to talk with Bob about the issues. I think it was very eye-opening on his part. He was really kind of amazed that I was up to speed on as many things that I was from a local standpoint. I guess they had some conversations afterwards. One of the people I know was involved was Mark [Burkehalter 50:23] and they approached me to run for Commissioner Chairman of Fulton County. I was flattered. I never really considered it. I said, “Well you need to give me some time to evaluate this and think about it,” and I did. I spoke to my wife about it and said, “Honey, I don't consider myself a politician. I hope that I never become a politician. I think this is a way for me to do something on a grander scale.” I had recognized that all politics is basically local because 95% of the political decisions that are made are made at the local level. Those are the ones that are going to affect you most. It’s basically standard constituent services, quality of life services.

I said, “Honey, I think if I run for this and I know there's going to be some adversities associated with it, I know they're going to try to paint me as something that I'm not. There's going to be some bad things said about me. I don’t want it to reflect on you, and I don't want it to reflect on our girls who were young at the time, but I think that this is the best way for me to probably do something on a grander scale, to have a positive impact on the community that we have made our home.” I decided to run and I was successful and got elected.

Well it everything I thought and more. There were a lot of things that happened. I had no regrets. I don't believe I turned into a politician. In fact, I know I didn't. I made all the decisions that I made that I thought were in the best interest of the constituency that supported me. I wasn't afraid to disagree with someone. I didn't buy any votes. People used to come up to me and say, “Mr. Chairman, if you don't support this issue for our community we’re going to pull our support for you.” I said, “Well, that's all well and good, but I think that if I take your position it’s actually going to adversely affect your community, even though you think to the contrary. In good conscious I can't support something that I truly believe is going to be harmful to you. If you want to pull your support for me, go right ahead, but I'm here basically to do the right thing, what I think is in the best interest after I’ve made my evaluation and that's what I'm going to do.”

That's what I did. I stuck to my principles and to my convictions. I think it goes all the way back to the challenges, again, when I started in grade school; I was a tall skinny kid that was always told no, and I learned how to go ahead and succeed and wasn't afraid to fail. Wasn't afraid of the consequences of being unsuccessful. Focused on what the intention was and what the goal was. Then always hoped that I had done the proper evaluation in order to be successful in achieving that goal.

Recently, I'm at the end of a 6 six year start-up company that the three of us started, myself, an associate of mine up in Minneapolis, and a friend of mine out in LA. I’m the President and CEO. We have a product that sells funding in healthcare and pension trusts. Took us about 6 years to get to this point. We’re finally, as they say, at the leaping off point. It’s starting to happening so the next 2 years are going to be very exciting for us.

Then the wife and I are starting to discuss where we want to live the rest of our lives. We've been empty-nesters for a while. One girl is in Arlington in Washington DC, the other one’s downtown. She'll be 29 in December the other one will be 25 in February. Where do we want to be? I don't want to be up north in the cold. It's too cold. I’m not going back there. I’ll go in the summer. Do we want to stay here in Atlanta and keep a place here? We really like the Panhandle in Florida. We used to have a home down there on the beach. We both want to get back there, but how much time if we did that would we spend down there. We’re starting to have those discussions and hopefully they’ll mature and be realized next year sometime, late next year. That’s kind of where we’re at. I’m trying to still play golf when I can.

If you want to simplify, it’s basically, you've got to follow your heart and usually if you do that you won't be wrong. You got to recognize that challenges come at a daily basis, just like driving down here in the traffic today. You got to start early so you're not late, which I did. Really that's the way I've conducted myself all the way through my life and recognized too that there are still many things to come, and there many decisions that are going to have to be made, because as long as you’re upright and breathing that's just the way the world works. Where am I going from here? Not sure.